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SUBJECT: CZECH POLITICS: AFTER 230 DAYS, A CONFIRMED
GOVERNMENT

REF: PRAGUE 25

1. (SBU) Summary: Nearly eight months after deadlocked parliamentary elections, a coalition government has won a vote of confidence in the Czech Parliament. By a vote of 100-97, Prime Minister Topolanek's second government won its vote of confidence on January 19. The three-party coalition of Topolanek's center-right ODS, supported by the smaller Christian Democrats and Greens, has exactly half of the 200 seats in the lower house. It won after two defectors from the opposition Social Democrats agreed to abstain from voting. The new government has a firmly transatlanticist orientation and an ambitious reform agenda. However, with every vote in parliament likely to be a struggle, it remains to be seen just how effective the government will be, and how long it will last. End summary.

2. (SBU) In the latest surprising turn in the saga that followed the deadlocked June 2-3 national elections, PM Topolanek's second government won a vote of confidence on January 19, despite serious doubts just a few days earlier that Topolanek could overcome opposition within his own party and the apparent unwillingness of any MPs outside of the three-party coalition to enable the vote to pass. Topolanek met on January 16 with the two deputies who had left the Social Democratic (CSSD) party club in recent months, Milos Melcak and Michal Pohanka, and appeared with them in public as they announced that they would both abstain in the January 19 vote. Rebels within Topolanek's ODS, including ODS Deputy and Prague Mayor Pavel Bem, subsequently voiced public support for the Topolanek government. Although the debate on January 19 was extremely long -- with nearly 40 members of the lower chamber taking the floor to make a statement in front of the TV cameras -- when the vote concluded just before 8:00pm the result was as anticipated (with the exception that one CSSD deputy did not use the proper format in casting his vote, invalidating his ballot, although he made clear that his intent was to vote against the government; note that early announcements that the vote was 99-98 resulted from a mistake at the parliament; the final and official tally was 100-97).

3. (SBU) Topolanek -- who has been battling a cold all week -- was careful not to boast following the victory. He accurately captured the sense of relief that most politicians and observers felt after both the extended political deadlock and the drawn out parliamentary debate. Rather than boasting, he and other coalition leaders highlighted the hard work ahead of them. Green Party Chairman and Deputy PM Martin Bursik put a positive spin on the coalition's weak position by noting that it will "force the government to work in an equitable and reliable manner, which will foster political dialogue." Topolanek also promised to cooperate

with the opposition CSSD.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: For over seven months, as he struggled to pull together a working government after leading his party to a clear victory in the June elections, PM Topolanek has been dismissed as not being up to the task. And repeatedly he has proved both critics and skeptics wrong. He did it again this week. Topolanek, who has been serving as prime minister since early September, will now be able to focus on the ambitious tasks his center-right coalition has established for itself (reftel), and on the upcoming negotiations on a U.S. radar in the country. He will confront many obstacles, including lingering opposition within his party, the challenge of keeping the two CSSD rebels satisfied, and the presence in the coalition of the untested Green party. There is no guarantee that this government will succeed in serving out the remainder of its four-year term. But it would be a mistake to dismiss it too soon. Septel will further analyze the Topolanek government's prospects. End comment.

¶5. (U) Following is the full composition of the Czech government (ODS - Civic Democrats, KDU-CSL - Christian Democrats, SZ - Greens):
Prime Minister: Mirek Topolanek (ODS)
Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs: Alexander Vondra (ODS)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development: Jiri Cunek (KDU-CSL)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment: Martin Bursik (SZ)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labor/Social Affairs: Petr Necas (ODS)
Foreign Affairs: Karel Schwarzenberg (ODA; nominated by SZ)
Finance: Miroslav Kalousek (KDU-CSL)
Interior: Ivan Langer (ODS)

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Health: Tomas Julinek (ODS)
Transport: Ales Rebicek (ODS)
Industry : Martin Riman (ODS)
Culture: Helena Trestikova (KDU-CSL)
Agriculture: Petr Gandalovic (ODS)
Justice: Jiri Pospisil (ODS)
Defense : Vlasta Parkanova (KDU-CSL)
Education: Dana Kuchtova (SZ)
Legislative Affairs: Cyril Svoboda (KDU-CSL)
Minister without Portfolio (for Minorities and Govt Advisory Bodies): Dзамila Stehlikova (SZ)
GRABER